Premeditated Causes of the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom: A Comprehensive Analysis of Contributing Factors that Led to the Manifestation of the Riots

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Abstract

In the last 30 years, the nature of communalism in India has changed significantly. This increase in violence is commonly attributed to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); however, there are other factors that contributed to the 2002 Gujarat pogrom. Despite the considerable research done on the Gujarat riots, little is known about their cause, aside from the BJP’s apparent involvement. This study uses qualitative research methods to uncover a comprehensive list of factors believed to have led to the riots. An analysis of firsthand accounts taken from witnesses, in conjunction with secondary research done by experts in the field, reveals a preponderance of causes independent of the BJP’s presence. The political insecurity of the state, in addition to a general lack of progressiveness, educational inequity, and an increase in the impact of globalization policies are the most important factors that led to the escalation of violence in Gujarat. This project will contribute to future research related to communal violence in India by helping researchers analyze the cause of the riots from an unbiased and historical perspective. It will help scholars realize that the causes of the riot were not only rooted in the BJP’s political agenda but were also the result of economic and sociological problems that have been present in Gujarat for centuries.

Introduction

Communal violence in India is not a new phenomenon, but the nature of such rioting has changed significantly in the past 30 years. Communalism is ethnic chauvinism that is connected with groups’ political allegiance to their ethnicity. Violent communal outbreaks are common in South Asia, being characterized as quarrels between religious communities. Nevertheless, the communal violence that occurred in Gujarat in 2002 took the shape of a one-sided, systematic pogrom backed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other members of the Sangh Parivar. A pogrom is a
state-backed riot directed against a minority group, characterized by targeted killings and destruction. Throughout this paper, I will explore the causes and character of the riots to determine whether or not they are a pogrom. This will involve ascertaining the extent of the BJP’s involvement in the Gujarat violence as well as the evidence for the party’s complicity.

The Sangh Parivar, representing the Hindu nationalist movement, is composed of several organizations, including the BJP and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), all inspired by the militant, conservative ideas of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In 2002, members of the BJP allegedly took part in communal violence in Gujarat, a state in the northwest corner of India, by acting as informants, propagandists, and recruiters. Their participation marks a crucial turning point in the history of communal violence, one in which riots cease to be spontaneous and become endemic. Widespread riots occur when “institutionalized riot systems exist in which known persons and groups occupy specific roles in the production of communal riots” like that of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom. In addition to the BJP’s alleged involvement, local factors, independent of party policies, may offer a more comprehensive explanation for why the Gujarat pogrom occurred.

Communal animosity has increased significantly in Gujarat during the past 30 years. This is commonly attributed to the rise of the BJP, a Hindu fundamentalist political party often accused of instigating and supporting the Gujarat riots of 2002, also referred to as the Godhra Riots. I aim to explore external factors, such as the effects of globalization on Gujarat’s economy and political autonomy, to determine whether or not this evidence can be used to ascertain the extent of the BJP’s alleged participation and involvement in the pogrom. All of these factors will be taken into account and analyzed to discover what really contributed to the communal conflict in Gujarat and if there is significant evidence to put the BJP at fault.

Overview

Two approaches can be used to explain communalism in India and the formation of a Hindu identity in the modern context—the culturalist and the materialist approach. The culturalist position holds that communalism is an inherent product of Indian culture. The materialist camp, on the other hand, asserts that communalism is the result of poor economic or social factors, manipulated by politicians to amass power, a charge often laid against the BJP. Subsequently, the materialist school analyzes external factors that lead to the escalation of communal violence. This approach is crucial to my paper because it lends evidence for why the BJP may be blamed for the escalation of the Godhra riots. Another important distinction for the materialists is the difference between religious and communal violence. Religious violence involves disputes regarding symbols, rites, etc., whereas communal violence is more deeply rooted in social, economic, and political problems.

Aside from these conceptual definitions, there are many reasons to account for the rise of communalism in India’s recent history. Some of these reasons stem from Muslim rulers in the medieval and early modern era and others are a result of British colonialism. In addition, some are a recent phenomenon rooted in the politics of Partition, the India-Pakistan conflict, and controversies surrounding sectarianism. All of these factors have worked together over the centuries to fuel the sustained communal conflict that pervades Indian society today.

Legends about how Mughal rulers “allegedly” treated Hindus when they were in power have deeply divided the Hindu and Muslim communities. Although these stories rarely have any basis in fact, they were employed by both the British colonizers and Hindu fundamentalists to distort Hindus’ perceptions of Muslims and divide the...
two groups politically. Beginning in 1906, the British assisted in the creation of the Muslim League, which was inspired by Indian Islamic reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s “two nation” principle—the idea that Muslims and Hindus formed separate nations within India. The 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms furthered this agenda by including a communal electoral principle, which was a deliberate attempt by the British to break the recently cemented alliance between Congress and the Muslim League. As the Freedom Struggle progressed during the Interwar Years, the Round Table Conferences were held by the British government, including emissaries from various communal groups with the goal of forcing the pro-democracy Congress to accept the communal principle. Finally, the principle reforms agreed upon at the Round Table Conferences evolved into the 1935 Government of India Act. This bill expanded the idea of a communal political system by providing different electorates for Hindus and Muslims. It allowed India to become a largely self-governing dominion within the British Empire with communalized electorates. Many scholars consider this to be a major turning point in the history of Indian communalism because it effectively politicized and institutionalized the communal divide between Hindus and Muslims.

Another important factor to keep in mind is the history of Gujarat itself. Most of the 2002 rioting occurred in places that had been under direct British control before 1947, not in areas formerly under the control of the princely states. This may indicate that the British divide and rule policy had a significant impact in the territories it directly controlled, causing Muslims and Hindus in these places to become more systematically divided than in other regions. In accordance with this, it is also important to keep in mind that Gujarat had a strong history of communal tension prior to independence that significantly exceeded that of other states. Likewise, after independence, Congress was much more conservative in Gujarat than in other states. This set the precedent for the political atmosphere found in Gujarat today.

After India became independent from the British Empire and Pakistan was formed as a separate nation, Gujarat faced its first large-scale communal massacre, arson, and looting in 1969. At this time, planned riots took place and the shops of Muslims were systematically destroyed. Nearly 1,000 lives were lost, and most Muslims’ shops were effectively demolished, resulting in several crore rupees (thousands of dollars) in property damage. In addition, several posters were hung on the streets during this violence that “called the violence a reprisal or revenge for 1946.” This sort of large-scale destruction and death suggests that the riots were preplanned just as they were in 2002.

Gujarat also has seen a significant rise in intercaste violence over the past 30 years, arising from attempts to cope with the breakdown of caste society. During the 1980s the higher castes’ influence over society was severely weakened by a coalition of lower castes known as KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasis, and Muslims). The goal of this alliance was to upset the social and political order in India in the hopes that lower castes would attain more power. KHAM created an atmosphere of anxiety and instability within the upper castes. The Sangh Parivar effectively capitalized on this fear in Gujarat by transforming the caste violence of the 1980s into a quarrel along communal lines. To do this, they blamed Muslims for society’s problems. This rhetoric resulted in the collaboration of all Hindus, no matter what their caste affiliation, on the basis of a unified Hindu identity.

In addition to the unification of Hindus along communal lines, current events in the mid-1980s and early 1990s contributed to the further division of Hindus and Muslims. One such event was the Shah Bano case, in which an older Muslim woman sought additional compensation from her divorced husband. According to Sharia law (that is, the religious law of Islam), she had received the highest amount, so she appealed
her case to the secular judicial system. However, the secular court ruled in favor of the Sharia law ruling. The case sparked a massive debate about secularism in India and questioned the justification for perpetuating multiple, communal legal systems. It was used as the primary example of India’s failure to be secular because Sharia law was upheld by the court at a time when Congress had full control of Parliament.14

The fallout of the Shah Bano case also fueled the Babri Masjid Controversy that was beginning to escalate. The destruction of the Babri Masjid (a mosque) had widespread effects on the country, just as the Shah Bano controversy had. Building momentum in the mid-1980s, the BJP called for the destruction of the Babri Masjid, which was supposedly built on the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. Many members of the BJP took part in the destruction of the mosque, those who were arrested behaving defiantly, and responding to the government’s allegations of their involvement by interrupting proceedings of Parliament and threatening to destroy more mosques. The BJP also succeeded in organizing a successful bandh protesting the government’s actions against those on trial.15 Unfortunately, the other opposition parties in Parliament failed to offer a unified response during the Babri Masjid crisis. This inaction strengthened the BJP and showed that an all-party front against communalism could not be sustained.16

**Historiography**

It is important to note that the Gujarat riots have not been dealt with in depth by scholars. Much of the evidence I used is still in website form, presented and interpreted by nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and other organizations either directly affiliated with the political institutions in power in Gujarat in 2002, or else openly opposed to them. Also note that there is widespread speculation regarding the BJP’s role in the violence, and a tendency among many people to blame the party without consulting the evidence. Now, proceed to review the historiography.

In *Social Conflict and the Neoliberal City: A Case of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India*, Ipsita Chatterjee, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, investigates “how neoliberal policies of globalization, [such as] industrial restructuring and urban renewal, re-order community life and can aggravate situations of social unrest.”17 Chatterjee examines the grounding process of neoliberal globalization in accordance with preexisting sociocultural and economic specificities of places. These factors, she argues, impart intercommunity relationships to conflicts. To fully understand localized conflicts, Chatterjee holds we must examine them within the context of the dynamics of globalization, which is the economic and cultural integration of different cultures that have arisen from an increase in human communication in the past century. The concept of “neoliberalism” is crucial to understanding both Chatterjee’s argument and the pogrom’s causes. Neoliberalism is economic liberalism that emphasizes the “efficacy of private enterprise, liberalized trade, and relatively open markets to promote globalization.”18 Furthermore, it “calls for minimal government intervention, a free-market economy, trade, financial liberalization, and a reduction of public expenditure.”19 These policies lead to a resurgence of ethno-religious conflicts and aggravate situations of social unrest, Chatterjee argues. She observes four case studies from Hindu-Muslim conflicts in Ahmedabad, Gujarat’s largest city, to support her thesis and finds that neoliberal policies tend to reinforce already existing geographies of exclusion, violence, and conflict.

Chatterjee’s article provides sound empirical research supporting the negative effects of globalization on localized communal conflicts. By interviewing members of both the Muslim and Hindu communities, interrogating government officials, and investigating policy statements, websites, and urban development plans, Chatterjee
finds that Ahmedabad’s promotion of neoliberal globalization has led to oppressive economics that target the poor and result in social tensions that contribute to conflict. This cycle of tension fragments and divides Ahmedabad’s lowest class creating an environment that allows sustained communal tension.

Like Chatterjee, Deana Heath, formerly a research fellow at Delhi University, observes the effects of globalization on India’s “secular” society. In *Communalism, Globalization, and Governmentality: Some Reflections on South Asia*, Heath assesses the structural relationship of communalism and globalization, arguing that they mutually constitute one another.\(^20\) She observes globalization within the realm of “global governmentality,” remarking that its function is to encourage individuals to voluntarily seek inclusion in a new global order.\(^21\) Thus, the aim of global governmentality is to improve the health and welfare of populations through self-aggrandizement.

Cynthia Talbot’s article, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-colonial India,” provides useful information on how Indian Muslims were commonly viewed in the medieval era, and how negative historical stereotypes have been used today by the Sangh Parivar. Talbot appeals to tales in which Muslims are depicted as demonic barbarians, threatening Hindu society. These stories were pervasive during the early centuries of Islamic expansion and were an expression of the threat felt by Hindu society.\(^22\) However, historically there is little evidence to support these extreme views. Despite this, they are used by politicians to polarize Hindus and Muslims.

It is a commonly held notion that modernization has directly promoted a sharper articulation of ethnic and communal identities in India, one that draws inspiration from false medieval histories. One example is Talbot’s analysis of the “supposed” temple destruction by Muslims in the medieval era. She found that “there is no evidence of a time when temples, well within the sphere of Muslim influence, were looted or damaged.”\(^23\) Temple destruction only occurred in places of conflict or political instability. Myths about Muslim invaders during the medieval era are pertinent because these same stories are used by right-wing radicals to justify the atrocities Indian Muslims often fall victim to today. Distinguishing between the evidence of actual temple destruction and the rhetoric used by BJP propaganda will help uncover the Hindutva narrative, that is, cultural nationalism associated with Indian culture, history, and ancestry.

Aside from these scholars, a major contributor to the field, who has authored multiple books, articles, and reports on communalism in modern India, the Bombay riots, the role of the Sangh Parivar, and the causes and nature of the Gujarat pogrom, is Asghar Ali Engineer. He is a writer and activist currently heading the Institute of Islamic Studies and the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in New Delhi. In his works, he compiles primary and secondary sources to give a comprehensive summary of the riots. Engineer is also an editor who relies on witness testimonies and commissioned reports to provide the reader with reliable primary evidence. *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India, The Gujarat Carnage, and Communal Riots After Independence* are all works of his that provide much of the evidentiary basis for this paper.

**Methodology**

Communal riots in India have persisted for centuries and are usually caused by tribal clashes, rumors, the manipulation of religious artifacts, intrusion by others on festivals, conflicting prayer times, disputes over places of worship, intermarriage, desecration of holy places, sexual offenses, the biased role of the police, or the
presence of Pakistani Muslims acting as agents. Riots generally conform to certain characteristics that include mob action, police complicity, isolated incidents of violence in urban areas, and insufficient legal punishment for the guilty. Although the riots in Gujarat in 2002 displayed a number of these characteristics, they were much more brutal and extreme than the “normal” riots that pervade Indian society. Such extremes included female mutilation and the massacre of Muslims. In addition, the riots were not stopped by the BJP government until nearly three days after they began, which implies that they were not sporadic but preplanned and condoned by both the national and state government. Given that direct evidence of the state’s complicity can be found, it is indisputable that this set of riots is instead a pogrom.

Originally, riots were used by the BJP as a way to win elections. The BJP learned that when major riots occur before an election, they are generally followed by intense interparty competition. This competition produces a communalized and polarized electoral result that the BJP uses to its advantage. Thus, the BJP derives power from exploiting groups along communal lines and taking advantage of unfortunate situations by blaming Muslims and other minority groups for local, state, and national problems. The BJP used this strategy of scapegoating Muslims to prolong confrontation between Hindus and Muslims in the hopes of intensifying their self-identities, which increased communal animosity.

The rise of the BJP was also marked by a profound cultural change in Gujarat. During the previous 100 years, traditional culture had been shaped and dominated by the higher castes. However, this political domination became challenged by the unification of the lower castes, known as KHAM. The upper castes felt threatened by their condition and responded by adopting Hindutva. This ideology made it clear that Muslims did not properly fit into the Gujarati culture unless they assimilated. Those who did not assimilate provoked the guardians of Hindutva to commit extreme acts of violence. Over the years, Hindutva gained momentum in Gujarat and was supported by a cross section of Indian society. Indian nationalism was no longer associated with the secular Indian state but became synonymous with Hindu nationalism and the push for a Hindu state. There was an increase in patriotism after the nuclear tests conducted by Congress, but the credit for this was absorbed by the BJP due to its electoral triumph just prior to the tests. These technological developments, in conjunction with India’s tougher stance vis-à-vis Pakistan, led to the communalization of national security in India. After testing nuclear weapons, the BJP established a national security council to undertake a strategic defense review, thus becoming the perceived guardian of Hindutva nationhood and ideology.

With the political growth of the BJP came the rise of unregulated free market capitalism and religious fanaticism. Many of Gujarat’s economic problems were the result of globalization policies implemented by the BJP, including de-licensing, disinvestment, privatization, and marketization. These policies led to an intensification of communalism because new economic liberalization initiatives aimed at greater privatization and increased global competitiveness. These policies eliminated lower-middle-class job security, increased the cost of living, and produced anxiety in all sections of society. They also created an environment in which individuals were more likely to believe the BJP’s message that Congress favored and protected Muslims, prizing them as a necessary and loyal “vote bank.”

Globalization is believed to have had three major effects on Gujarati society. First, it led to an increase in religious and cultural identity formation due to the threat of identity loss from the infiltration of Western culture. This caused urban/westernized and rural people to become more polarized than they had been in the past. Globalization also only provided economic opportunities for the wealthy and
educated. Also, because many companies that existed in India are headquartered in First World countries, globalization led to an increase in non-resident Indian citizens (NRIs). These NRIs, scattered in non-Hindu societies worldwide, are believed to suffer from an identity crisis and are more likely to support the radical Hindutva message than mainstream Indians. Because of this, they are responsible for contributing substantial donations to the Sangh Parivar from the West, drastically increasing the funds available to conservative Hindu political parties in India.

Globalization also denies minorities the fruits of prosperity because development often enhances economic, social, and communal divisions, creating a gross divide between rich and poor that is expressed in explicitly ethnic terms. In fact, “in cities that hosted global economic activities, economic space ascends over life space and the people’s survival instincts are marginalized by the activities of the rising global business class.” This marginalization has resulted in the ghettoization of Muslims in Gujarat and throughout India. Muslims moved from their traditional areas and, because of their social distance from mainstream Hindus, were easily dehumanized and characterized as a criminal underclass. Because they are segregated from one another socially, despite living within the same proximity, both Hindus and Muslims are able to dehumanize one another easily.

In recent years, Gujarat has actively promoted modernization and industrialization with no protection for the working-class poor, welcoming assessment management companies to invest in Ahmedabad. These companies have made a portion of the population vulnerable by banning economic activities crucial to their stability. For instance, bans against street hawking on major roads and evictions of hawkers from important public places have precluded important economic activities for unlicensed businesses. In addition, the city of Ahmedabad has accumulated a substantial debt to keep up with interest rates from the loans they acquired in the 1990s. As a result, the city could no longer pay to cover the cost of parks and gardens and responded by handing them over to the private sector, which resulted in the nearly complete privatization of the city. This gave assessment management companies even more power because it allowed them to withdraw from affirmative action hiring obligations that the state previously upheld. Thus, companies were able to more easily hire along communal lines, excluding Muslims from jobs that used to be open to the public, subject to minority preferences and quotas.

During the time Gujarat acquired its debt, the state introduced an economic policy called the New Economic Plan (NEP). This policy caused long-term structural changes to Gujarat’s economy by allowing global corporations to operate under fewer regulations. This lack of regulation resulted in decreased wages, work, and benefits for workers. The NEP also shifted the focus of urban development plans from infrastructure development and public housing to urban renewal projects geared toward “beautification” and the forced evacuation of the urban poor. This process, also known as exclusion, occurs when “metropolises compete with one another to improve their economic efficiency [and] exclude marginal areas that cannot keep up with the high standard of living.” “Exclusion” results in higher levels of poverty and increased vulnerability for city dwellers. This policy fostered reactionary politicians to use urban-industrial decay as a breeding ground for ethno-religious hysteria.

The policies of industrial reconstruction and urban renewal have reordered community life and aggravated situations of social unrest for the past two decades. Furthermore, it is apparent that global policies have been used effectively by politicians to reinforce already existing geographies of exclusion, violence, and conflict. These promarket politics have resulted in the poor fighting each other for shrinking life space, resulting in a communalism that expresses economic conflicts in ethnic terms.
In addition to globalization, there are other local factors that affected the communal relationship between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of the Gujarat pogrom. First, the city of Godhra’s population is composed of Muslims and Hindus in more or less equal numbers. Also, Ahmedabad has a divergent history, unlike the rest of Gujarat, one fueled by consumerism, producing a city characterized by rapid ghettoization and urbanization. Ahmedabad is divided into two main districts. The east district was the first to industrialize and now mainly consists of slums, being known for its walled old city. The west, on the other hand, consists mostly of residential areas where middle- to upper-class residents live. This is where Western schools and globalizing projects are found. The east side has experienced a decline in living standards since the closing of the mills in the late 1980s. These local factors may account for why the violence started in these cities. Also, in most parts of India and particularly Gujarat, disregard for the law is taught at a young age and is considered acceptable and preferable, given the nature of the police. In fact, in popular Indian cinema, people engage in all sorts of extreme violence without fear of police intervention or legal consequences. The persistent message of Hindi cinema is that the police are either ineffective, corrupt, or both. Even positive portrayals of the police depict them operating above or outside of the law, securing an intuitive “justice” through violent acts. Disrespect for the law and glorification of violent solutions, paired with few employment prospects, made it acceptable for youth to take part in communal violence and made them fully confident they would not get punished.

In Gujarat, a substantial portion of the population lived below the poverty line, creating large discrepancies in economic equality. In fact, the unemployment rate among Muslim high school graduates is high, with only 27% engaged in regular, salaried work. Most Muslims are self-employed by street vending, small trades, and unlicensed enterprises. Self-employment makes the community much more exposed to disruptions and damages caused by urban conflict and violence. Ghettoized Muslims have poor access to bank credit due to the small number of banks in the Muslim majority localities, as well as traditional Islamic proscriptions against lending and borrowing at interest. There also is no modern education or medical services available due to the lack of infrastructure in Muslim-majority areas. Finally, Muslims are poorly represented in the public sector, especially when it comes to security and law enforcement jobs. These factors make Muslims extremely vulnerable in Indian society because they have no resources to counteract the sustained oppression by the Hindu majority.

**Nature of Attacks**

A preponderance of evidence supports the view that the 2002 riots in Gujarat were not normal, sporadic riots, but instead a planned attack orchestrated by the government. The drama began to unfold on February 27, 2002, when the Sabarmati Express caught fire, killing 58 Kar Sevaks returning from Ayodhya, former site of the Babri Masjid. Prior to this catastrophe, there were several incidents of Muslims being harassed on the train; however, no action was taken to prevent further violence. In fact, “all along the route [the Kar Sevaks] misbehaved with hawkers, teased women, shouted slogans at many stations and made inflammatory speeches.” There was even evidence of a Muslim girl being molested and abducted on the platform at Godhra. Despite this, no actions were taken by the police against the Kar Sevaks. After rumors about the abducted Muslim girl spread, a crowd of nearly 2,000 Muslims gathered to retrieve her from the side of the train, which had stopped about a kilometer away from the Godhra station. Coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express was torched, killing mostly women and children, who were trapped inside the besieged bogie.
Immediately after the train was set on fire, the leaders of the Gujarat government automatically assumed the train burning was a result of a Pakistani terrorist conspiracy orchestrated by the collaboration of Pakistanis and Indian Muslims.\textsuperscript{54} BJP authorities went so far as to arrest two Muslims suspected of involvement in Kashmir, although neither of them had a history of militant activity, and despite there being insufficient evidence to support the state’s charges.\textsuperscript{55} In addition, train assault victims’ bodies were publicly moved from Godhra to Ahmedabad, their location being advertised on the radio.\textsuperscript{56} This break with normal media protocol regarding communal conflict incited additional violence by further angering the Hindus of Ahmedabad, setting the stage for large-scale retaliation against the Muslim community. Also, on February 28, a \textit{bandh} was called by the VHP and supported by the BJP, causing even more tension.\textsuperscript{57, 58} These reactions suggest the government’s complicity in the riots.

Further evidence that the riots were planned may be gleaned from observing what happened in the weeks prior to the Godhra train attack. Throughout the state, Bajrang Dal camps (the VHP youth organization) were set up, featuring secret meetings in which swords were distributed to youth who were explicitly prepared for “war.”\textsuperscript{59} Also, according to firsthand accounts acquired by an independent fact-finding mission, a month before the riots took place all subinspectors in Ahmedabad were transferred to different locations.\textsuperscript{60} Police transfers were given to those who actively opposed the BJP in the weeks preceding the riots.\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, the police who remained were commissioned to gather lists of Muslims’ homes and businesses. Interestingly, voter registration lists were used by rioters to target all Muslims in a given area during the riots.\textsuperscript{62} This shows a direct connection between the planning orchestrated with the help of bureaucratic officials and the actual implementation of their plan to destroy all Muslims.\textsuperscript{63}

The non-English media also helped ignite violence by spreading false stories, resulting in the spread of biased information and untrue rumors. Many of the non-English newspapers, in fact, are owned by political parties organized by the RSS.\textsuperscript{64} This means that they are commonly used by the Hindu right wing for political leverage. During the Gujarat riots, newspapers such as \textit{Sandesh} spread incredible stories about what Muslims allegedly had done to Hindus. For instance, they ran stories supporting the theory that the train attack was a Pakistani conspiracy, and advertised when and where the bodies of the Kar Sevaks would be transferred. Most notably, these newspapers were never charged for printing false stories to incite violence.\textsuperscript{65} During the Gujarat riots, many factions of society were affiliated with right-wing Hindus and either implicitly or explicitly helped in the destruction of Muslims. Because of this collaboration between the vernacular press and extremist political groups, the riots became widespread and dangerous.

There are many characteristics of the 2002 riots that distinguished them from previous rioting in Gujarat. First, the rioters used fire to kill Muslim victims. This is significant for two reasons: (1) it symbolized the notion of “fire for fire,” that is, because the Kar Sevaks were burned alive on the train, so should the Muslims be burned; and (2) it demolished the victims’ bodies entirely, preventing families of the victims from receiving appropriate compensation because there was no way to identify the charred bodies.\textsuperscript{66}

This was also the first time the Sangh Parivar was publicly active in promoting communal riots. Few attempts were made to hide the identities of those involved and some members of the government went as far as to openly encourage the violence.\textsuperscript{67} Another new feature was that the violence spread to 37 cities and towns that had no history of communal violence. Interestingly, the VHP, RSS, and Bajrang Dal had a presence in many of these cities in the weeks preceding the riot and were responsible for organizing rallies in the wake of the train burning.\textsuperscript{68}
Aside from rural areas with no history of communal violence, the Adivasis, a low-caste group with no history of communal animosity and one in competition with Muslims for menial jobs, also took part in the violence for the first time. After attending a Sangh Parivar rally, Adivasis took part in the riot under the influence of alcohol and false propaganda. In addition to being given liquor, their routes were preplanned from village to village. When they were drunk, they were briefed by the Sangh Parivar on an impending attack by Muslims and the adverse economic prospects they would face when the Muslims returned. \(^{69}\)

Driven by false propaganda and fear, rioters ruthlessly destroyed symbols of Islam including hundreds of mosques and the statue of a famous Urdu poet, Wali Gujarati. \(^{70, 71}\) These symbols were not only destroyed, but were replaced with Saffron flags and makeshift temples. Furthermore, after the carnage, no efforts were made by the state to rebuild Muslim structures or compensate the owners for their damage. These actions symbolize the demise of Islam and its replacement by Hinduism. \(^{72}\)

Finally, the rhetoric used by the leaders of Gujarat during the riots provides further evidence for why the definition of a pogrom fits better than a set of spontaneous riots. \(^{73}\) In their speeches, the leaders of the BJP targeted all Muslims and claimed that the riots represented a “successful Hindutva experiment.” In fact, Gordhan Zadaphiya, Home Minister of Gujarat, openly encouraged the mobs. The leaders also attempted to initiate a yatra, or holy pilgrimage, to carry the ashes of the train victims to 750 places in India. However, this activism was banned by the Election Commission because of the danger it posed to the stability of the country. \(^{74}\) The leaders of the BJP manipulated the people during the riots to create an atmosphere conducive to communal politics. This political tactic allowed the BJP to mobilize a large number of people at once by appealing to anyone who was a Hindu, thus creating a popular legitimization of elite rule. \(^{75}\)

After the riots ceased, their seriousness was downplayed by the state and central government, both controlled by the BJP. For instance, the investigation of the cause of the riots was handed over to P.N. Barot, assistant police commissioner and known BJP sympathizer. \(^{76}\) Also, no political leaders visited the relief camps until nearly two months after the carnage. They did this because they claimed they did not want to distract the relief workers from their duties. In addition, minimum compensation was offered by the government to the riot victims and their families. Most of the funding for the relief camps was not provided by the government, but was rather funded by other Muslims and nonprofit organizations—including, to be fair, some non-extremist Hindu aid organizations. \(^{77}\) Because of this lack of recognition and support, conditions of the relief camps were horrible. In fact, at one camp, there were only five toilets for 9,000 people, and no female doctors were on hand for the victims of sexual abuse. \(^{78}\)

The conditions of the relief camps are simply one example of the government’s ambivalence toward the victims of the Gujarat riots. Leaders of both the central and state government clearly did not do enough to aid or obtain justice for citizens who had been savagely raped or killed. This inaction is exemplified by their ambiguous responses to the carnage and the state’s unwillingness to punish the rioters. In addition, the use of voter registration lists to target all Muslims in a given area, along with systematic efforts to destroy every facet of their way of life, including their homes, businesses, and dignity, indicates that the riots were not a spontaneous occurrence but rather a preplanned attack orchestrated by the Gujarat state government and implicitly backed by the central government of India.

In addition to the actual events that unfolded, an underlying, hateful ideology pervades Gujarati society and has been propagated by the Hindu right for the past several decades. Specifically, the Hindu majority holds the view that it is being
infected and threatened by ethno-religious minority groups. These feelings are not
limited to Muslims, but to any minority religious group that threatens Hindutva. This
threat, compiled with the occurrence of human rights violations in the past 30 years,
implies that riots are likely to continue and escalate in nature. An example that
mirrors what happened to Muslims in 2002 is the systematic targeting of Christians
by the Sangh Parivar in 1998. The BJP claimed that Christians started the violence
(just as the Muslims started the train fire), while Hindus were merely acting to protect
themselves. Individual Christians living in all-Hindu neighborhoods were singled
out and attacked much like Muslims were in 2002. The attacks continued for several
days after the riots and were justified as a manifestation of pent-up anger at forced
conversions. Provocative anti-Christian leaflets distributed after the carnage followed
by hate speeches suggests preplanning and intent to destroy the group. Afterward,
most Hindus agreed that Christians were a threat to the Hindu majority and were dealt
with appropriately.

The BJP endorsed outright lies to gain political clout, such as the view that Hindus
were being forcibly converted to Christianity. They even succeeded in passing the
Freedom of Religion Bill, which prevented forced religious conversions. This bill
specifically targeted the conversions of Hindus to Islam or Christianity and was used
as a way to deliberately polarize the state. Those who converted were fined $20, even
if the conversion was legitimate. This law stemmed from Hindus’ fears of becoming a
minority. These fears were effectively legitimized by the BJP and Sangh Parivar and
used to incite violence upon religious minorities.

In 2002, the fear of Hindu population decline was coupled with propaganda
portraying Muslims as uncontrollable breeders. These ideas made Hindus fearful that
the Muslim population would rise, resulting in the loss of political power for traditional
Hindu leaders. The powerful psychological effects of hate propaganda created a sense
of humiliation in Hindus, spurred fear that a siege from the outside was imminent, and
aimed to target the community “responsible” for the nation’s degradation.

The fact that the riots were rooted in Hindus’ fear of becoming a minority is
evident by their inhumane and sadistic treatment of Muslim women. During the riots,
women were specifically targeted and their genitals were destroyed, symbolizing
the destruction of their group’s ability to procreate. In fact, “one woman, Kauser
Bano, who was nine-months pregnant, had her belly cut open and her fetus [violently
removed], then swung on the edge of a sword before being dashed to the ground
and flung into the fire. According to eyewitness accounts, at least two more women
were subjected to a similar fate.” Many women were gang-raped and subjected to
unimaginable torture. For instance, a girl named Khairunnisa, daughter of Marukh
Bano, was gang-raped by a mob of 11 men in front of her father. Furthermore, B, a
twenty-one-year-old from Dahod district, was forced to give birth to her baby as she
was running away from the mobs. After delivering, she was forced to walk several
kilometers where she was finally cornered. She reflected:

They had not come to help us. They stopped us and then the madness
started. They pulled my baby from my arms and threw her away.
I and the other women were taken aside and raped. I was raped by
three men. I was screaming. They beat me and then left me for
dead. When I regained consciousness I found I was alone. All around
me were the dead bodies of my family, my baby girl, the newborn
baby. They were covered with stones.

Similarly, there are many eyewitness accounts of young children being targeted
by the mobs. For instance, before the tribunal, a “witness described how [petroleum
disguised as water] was poured into the mouth of a six year old boy” and set on
fire, causing his body to combust instantly. Swords and iron rods were used indiscriminately, targeting men, women, children, and the elderly in the attacks. In Naroda Gaon and Patiya, there is evidence of close to 150 people being burned alive after being hacked, cut, and gang-raped. The bodies were then thrown in a well and buried in a mass grave.

Even former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri could not be saved from the mobs. After making more than 200 desperate phone calls to bureaucrats in all levels of government, including the “Director General of police, the Police Commissioner, the Chief Secretary, and the Additional Chief Secretary,” Jafri was murdered mercilessly without any police intervention. In fact, well aware of the notion that he was a specific target, Jafri allowed himself to be dragged out of his own house . . . and was stripped, paraded naked, and asked to say, “Vande Mataram!” and “Jai Shri Ram!” He refused. His fingers were chopped off and he was paraded around in the locality, badly injured. Next, his hands and feet were chopped off. Then he was dragged, a fork-like instrument clutching his neck, down the road before being thrown into the fire.

The attack on Jafri and his family was so meticulously planned that the water from the tanks surrounding Jafri’s house had been emptied so that the fires could not be put out. In addition, there is evidence that certain areas, such as Panchmahal, were cleansed of all Muslim residents living in the area and that Muslims were killed by the hundreds after being raped, cut, and burnt alive.

In conclusion, it is believed by some that the deployment of the army was purposely delayed so that the mobs could eliminate the Muslims in the first 72 hours of the riots.

**Conclusion**

During the past 30 years, the RSS and Sangh Parivar have successfully created an exclusive group identity between Hindus and Muslims that has infiltrated Gujarati society. This identity, paired with the rise of religious orthodoxy and conservatism, has created a mutually exclusive political climate in Gujarat. Group identity thus plays a significant mobilizing role for the BJP because the policies of the modern democracy allow for a capitalist society to instigate communal problems. This atmosphere, compiled with the state-centered drive to homogenize and normalize Muslims and a history of ethno-religious violence, created a political safe house for the BJP and Sangh Parivar to create a “successful Hindutva experiment.”

The Godhra riots were much more than a spontaneous set of riots resulting from a communal dispute. Instead, they were a part of a larger plan to cleanse Muslims of the greater Gujarati population. This “Hindutva experiment” was implicitly backed by the BJP government, which is shown by the brutal nature of the riots and the government’s inability to stop them in a timely manner. It is undoubtedly true that other factors, such as the effects of globalization on Gujarat’s economy and political autonomy, may be to blame for the increase in violence. However, these are economic policies that were brought on by BJP and were arguably designed to pit Hindus against Muslims.

The inhumane nature of the Gujarat riots, in addition to the fact that they were not halted in a timely manner, implies some sort of complicity on the part of the BJP at both a state and local level. There is no reason why mobs of Hindus were allowed to riot for days without the intervention of the national army or local police force. Furthermore, rioting Hindus were armed with lists of Muslims’ residencies so that they could specifically target each Muslim resident in the city. This carnage was orchestrated throughout the state and occurred in areas that had no history of communal conflict but had a noticeably high Sangh Parivar presence. In these areas, members of
the Sangh Parivar handed out radical anti-Muslim literature pamphlets and weapons to angry mobs that had been given excessive amounts of alcohol. After the riots finally ceased, there were little to no resources for the Muslims displaced at the internment camps. Government officials did not oversee the camps because they claimed they did not want to distract the relief workers from their duties.

Because of the BJP’s close ideological relationship with the Sangh Parivar, it is easy to ascertain why there was so little done to stop the riots. The evidence that compromises the BJP is significant because they are still in control of the Gujarati government. As of now, no public apology and little economic compensation has been given to the victims. If none of the leaders of the BJP are rightfully punished for allowing these heinous actions to occur under their rule, there is no telling if another pogrom such as this could happen again in the near future.

Notes
3. Ibid.
4. The Mughal rulers were an imperial power in the Indian subcontinent that mostly consisted of Muslims who were direct descendants of Genghis Khan.
6. http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gaz_atlas_1931/pager.php?object=45. According to this map, eight of the thirteen districts listed in *Crime against Humanity* as having the most post-Godhra violence were controlled by the British prior to independence. The remaining five were Princely States heavily influenced by the British presence.
9. Ibid. Also see Chenoy et al., 4.
12. Shani, 70.
15. A bandh is a form of protest used by political activists in South Asia in which a political party or community declares a general strike and the entire city shuts down.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 145–46.
21. Ibid., 577.

23. Ibid., 718.


26. Ibid., 239.


28. Ibid., 175.


32. Ibid., 129.


36. Ibid., 15.

37. Ibid., 11.

38. Mahadevia, 393.

39. Ibid., 394.

40. Ibid., 397.

41. Ibid., 398.

42. Chatterjee, 144.

43. Ibid.

44. Mahadevia, 379.


46. Mahadevia, 380.


48. Ibid.

49. A Kar Sevak is someone who volunteers for a religious cause. In this context, a Kar Sevak refers to the people who often visit the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram, the former site of the Babri Masjid.


52. Yagnik and Sheth, 1009.


54. Chenoy et al., 22.


56. Chenoy et al., 15.

57. The Visva Hindu Parisad (VHP) is an international Hindu organization known for its involvement in the dispute over the Babri Masjid. At this time, the VHP claimed the mosque was on the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram and petitioned for its demolition.

58. Ibid., 17.
60. Chenoy et al., 24.
61. Ibid.
63. Chenoy et al., 31.
64. Brass, 345.
67. Ibid.
70. Urdu is a language identified with Muslims in South Asia. It is the national language of Pakistan and is widely spoken by Muslims in India.
71. CPI(M)-AIDWA Delegation, 2.
72. Parekh, 171.
73. Ibid.
74. CPI(M), 1.
76. Concerned Citizens Tribunal, 34.
77. Ibid., 21.
78. Ibid.
81. Lobo, 4845.
85. Concerned Citizens Tribunal, 39.
86. Ibid.
87. CPI(M)-AIDWA Delegation, 8–9.
88. Concerned Citizens Tribunal, 39.
89. Ibid., 40.
90. Chenoy et al., 6.
91. Concerned Citizens Tribunal, 27.
92. Ibid., 30.
93. Ibid., 65.
94. CPI(M), 56.
Bibliography


